



State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services

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WESTERN CAROLINA CENTER NAMED IN HONOR OF IVERSON RIDDLE

RALEIGH – For 40 years, Dr. Iverson Riddle has served as the guiding force behind Western Carolina Center. Today, those efforts are being recognized as the center is formally renamed the “J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center.”

The center, which is located in Morganton, opened in 1963. It is one of five state residential facilities for people with mental retardation and related disabilities. Dr. Riddle has been at the helm of the center since before it opened. He is a native of Morganton.

In naming the center, DHHS Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom recognized Dr. Riddle’s lifetime commitment to the center, its residents and their families. “Your capabilities are respected on a national level,” she said. “The programs and research at Western Carolina Center have made vast contributions to the treatment of developmental disabilities.

“The first time I visited the center, I was struck by what an incredible vision Iverson had in making the center a reality,” she added. “By any measure, the J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center is a showcase – providing a supportive environment for people with mental retardation. You can see it in the faces of the residents. You can see it in the effort put forth by a staff absolutely dedicated to this vision. One man’s vision has equaled happier lives for the people who have lived here and their families.”

During its four decades under Dr. Riddle’s leadership, the center has compiled an impressive list of “firsts,” for a residential mental retardation center, including:

- The nation’s first Residential Advocacy Program, which is now both a federal and state requirement for such facilities;
- The first Human Rights Commitment in the Southeast;
- The first state-funded early intervention program;
- The first residential fine arts program for people with mental retardation (residents of the center have displayed artwork at major galleries across the country);
- The first group home east of the Mississippi;
- The first Volunteer Services Program;
- The first institutional Covenant Center for research and development of religious and ministry services for people with severe, multiple handicaps;
- The first pet therapy program; and,
- The first equestrian program for people with multiple handicaps.

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